

VZCZCXRO5739

PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN
RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHNY #0040 0180633
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 180633Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY OSLO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6548
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 0119
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 0212
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 1330
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 0472

UNCLAS OSLO 000040

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [KPAL](#) [KIRF](#) [OREP](#) [NO](#)

SUBJECT: MUSLIM AMERICAN CONGRESSMAN IN NORWAY ON FAITH,
PEACE, AND COMBATING U.S. STEREOTYPES

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The visit of Congressman Keith Ellison (D-MN) to Oslo 7-11 January focused on peace and reconciliation in the Middle East and establishing ties to Norway. It was a boon to post's interfaith outreach and helped combat stereotypes of the United States and administration policy. END SUMMARY.

Peace and Reconciliation

¶2. (U) Ellison's visit was arranged by the MFA after he met with their embassy in Washington to discuss his role as the new Congressman for one of the most traditionally Norwegian-American constituencies in the United States. He sought to learn about Norway's tradition of peace and reconciliation efforts and to explore inter-faith dialogue as a component of peace, especially in the Middle East. Congressman Ellison has previously traveled to the Gulf States and Israel, as well as to Syria with Speaker Pelosi.

¶3. (SBU) During his meetings with the MFA, peace research institutes such as PRIO and NUPI, the parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs and at former PM Bondevik's Oslo Center, Ellison elicited expert analysis of the Middle East peace process in the wake of Annapolis and the role of Iran. He heard calls for more pressure on Israel to provide better access and support for international organizations to assist Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, to reduce Jewish settlements, and pull back to or near the 1967 borders. All were grudgingly positive towards the Annapolis effort, but opinions varied as to whether it would have any significant impact. The Norwegians promoted increased dialogue with Iran as critical to obtaining regional stability, but agreed that the current Iranian administration was 'disruptive and negative.'

Embassy Outreach

¶4. (U) Reaching out to youth leadership in Norway's immigrant community (which includes a high percentage of African, Arab, and South Asian members), post hosted a reception in Congressman Ellison's honor at the Embassy. Response to the invitation was very positive, with many guests requesting to bring a friend or group with them to the event. Ellison spoke briefly and positively about his experience as a black Muslim in the U.S., discussed the importance of inter-faith dialogue, challenged stereotypes about attitudes towards the U.S. and U.S. policy, and then took questions. Audience members did not hold back, asking him about reparations for slavery, how he could represent a country that was 'at war with Islam' and whether he was able to speak freely in the United States as someone who critiques the administration's policies. The positive and fair responses that he gave

impressed skeptical listeners. The event went 40 minutes over schedule because they continued to ask questions of the Congressman after he was done speaking. Students approached embassy officers to talk about study opportunities in the U.S. and several guests expressed gratitude for the event.

¶5. (U) As a result of the event, the Embassy has been encouraged to co-host an event for Black History Month with the Nobel Center that will focus on civil rights in the U.S. and celebrate the achievements of Nobel Peace Prize winner Martin Luther King, Jr. We have also been invited to participate in a lunch with young Pakistani-Norwegian leaders to discuss current politics in the Pakistani community in Norway. In response to attendee interest, post will seek a speaker for the second half of 2008 to continue the discussion on diversity and immigration issues from personal experience. Post will continue to emphasize education in the United States as part of the Ambassador's campaign to double the number of Norwegian students (of all races, colors, and faiths) studying in the U.S. by 2012, providing direct exposure to the diversity of the United States.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: While clearly critical of administration approaches, Congressman Ellison took on some caricatures of U.S. policy with conviction. Having him tell young Muslims how the U.S. has protected Muslims and how the Administration reaches out to Muslims at home and abroad was extremely valuable. Ellison's visit helped counter simplistic and irrational anti-Americanism, while also demonstrating the range of views in the United States. END COMMENT.

WHITNEY